

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

SENT TO D.C.

6-29-05

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name **Central Park Theater**

other names/site number **House of Prayer, Church of God in Christ**

2. Location

street & number **3531-39 West Roosevelt Road**

____ Not for publication

city or town **Chicago**

____ vicinity

state **Illinois**

code **IL**

county **Cook**

code **031**

zip code **60624**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally ____ statewide ____ locally. (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

William L. White / *15 HPO*
Signature of certifying official

6-27-05
Date

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

American Indian Tribe

Name of Property **Central Park Theater**

County and State **Cook County/Illinois**

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.		
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the		
National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.		
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the		
National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain):	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
 district
 site
 structure
 object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	buildings
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	sites
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	structures
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register **N/A**

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Name of Property **Central Park Theater**

County and State **Cook County/Illinois**

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: movie theater

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Religion: Religious Facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

Other: Spanish Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: **concrete**

Roof: **unknown**

Walls: **brick**

Other: **terra cotta**

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets

Name of Property **Central Park Theater**

County and State **Cook County/Illinois**

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Criterion A: Entertainment/Recreation

Criterion A: Invention

Criterion C: Engineering

Period of Significance **1917-1955**

Significant Dates **1917 (date of construction)**

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) **N/A**

Cultural Affiliation **N/A**

Architect/Builder **Rapp and Rapp (C.W. and George L. Rapp), architects**

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.) **See Continuation Sheets**

Name of Property **Central Park Theater**

County and State **Cook County, Illinois**

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repositories: **Burnham Library; Chicago Historical Society; Theater Historical Society; University of Illinois at Chicago**

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property **less than one acre**

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Northing 16.4634.980

Easting 16.441.300

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

See Continuation Sheet

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

See Continuation Sheet

Name of Property **Central Park Theater**

County and State **Cook County/Illinois**

11. Form Prepared By

name/title **Jean Guarino Clark**

organization **Historical Consultant**

date **March 15, 2005**

street & number **950 North Leavitt St.**

telephone **773-252-9734**

city or town **Chicago** state **Illinois**

zip code **60622**

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name **House of Prayer, Church of God, In Christ**

Dr. Lincoln Scott, Pastor

street & number **3531-39 West Roosevelt Road**

telephone **773-551-7259**

city or town **Chicago** state **Illinois**

zip code **60624**

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Central Park Theater is located at 3531-39 West Roosevelt Road, between Central Park and St. Louis Avenues in Chicago's Lawndale community area, which is about three miles southwest of the central business district. The theater faces north onto Roosevelt (formerly Twelfth Street), a busy four-lane thoroughfare that served as the bustling spine of Lawndale's commercial district in the early 20th century.

At the time the Central Park Theater was constructed in 1917, Lawndale was experiencing a tremendous population surge. Between 1910 and 1920, the number of residents more than doubled from 46,226 to 93,750.¹ This wave of settlement was comprised largely of Russian immigrants, mainly Jewish, who moved west along Roosevelt Road from their former center in the vicinity of Roosevelt Road and Halsted Streets. They formed the nucleus of Lawndale's Jewish community, which comprised the dominant foreign-born group in North Lawndale by 1920. A further increase in the twenties put the peak population in 1930 at over 112,000.

During the 1950s, Lawndale's Jewish residents relocated northward to other communities while the African-American population increased from 13,000 to more than 113,000. The character of the Roosevelt Road shopping strip completely changed after the 1968 riots that followed the assassination of Dr. King, as large swaths were destroyed by fire. Remaining storeowners subsequently moved when insurance companies either canceled their policies or prohibitively increased their premiums. The riots, combined with the racial turnover in Lawndale between 1950 and 1970, purportedly resulted in the loss of 75 percent of its business establishments, and many of the retail/entertainment facilities burned out or closed on Roosevelt Road were never replaced.²

The Central Park Theater today stands as a rare surviving example of an early 20th century entertainment venue that once served Lawndale's large Jewish population, and later, its African-American residents. The theater—featuring twin towers, red brick cladding and extensive terra cotta banding—also remains a unique visual landmark along Roosevelt Road and a reminder of its past as Lawndale's primary commercial corridor. Although Lawndale is slowly rebounding from a decades-long period of economic stagnation, Roosevelt Road has lost the majority of its historic commercial buildings and still features large areas of vacant land. In fact, the majority of commercial buildings originally located on either side of the Central Park Theater have been demolished. Today, only two historic commercial buildings remain on this block, one of which is adjacent to the theater's east façade, while the other is located at the corner of Roosevelt Road and Central Park Avenue. A large parking lot is currently situated on the west side of the theater.

¹ The Chicago Fact Book Consortium. *Local Community Fact Book, Chicago Metropolitan Area, 1990*. (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1995) 107.

² Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 2

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

Exterior

The three-story Central Park Theater has a flat roof, twin towers, and a deep rectangular footprint that stretches between Roosevelt Road and the alley to the south. The architectural character of the theater's front (Roosevelt Road) façade has retained the majority of its architectural integrity in terms of design and materials. Brick-clad twin towers flank the building's central entrance bay and provide a dominant visual focal point. The base of each tower features metal doors that access stairways originally used by theater patrons exiting the balcony level.

The first floor retains its original three-bay configuration: the central bay served as the main entrance to the theater and the two side bays served as storefronts. At some point during the 1970s, all three bays were infilled with a simulated stone cladding. However, several courses of horizontal terra cotta banding were retained between the first and second floors, and the door openings at the base of the twin towers are still surrounded by terra cotta. In the center bay—which formerly featured a ticket window and a series of wood double-doors—the former theater space is currently accessed via three pairs of glass doors with metal frames. The theater's two side bays remain recognizable as former storefronts, each retaining its recessed side door openings and bays that once featured display windows. It is possible that historic storefront materials may remain beneath the new cladding. The central entrance bay was originally sheltered by a delicate flat-roofed iron canopy that was replaced by a marquee in the 1920s. The 1920s marquee was subsequently replaced by a later version, which was removed sometime after the theater closed in 1971.

The upper two floors and twin towers of the theater's front façade are clad in red face brick and their fenestration is symmetrically arranged into nine bays. Original wood casement windows were later replaced with the current one-over-one aluminum windows that mimic the arrangement of the originals: windows in the three center bays are arranged in groups of three; windows in the side bays are paired with transoms, and the twin towers each feature single window openings. Spandrels and piers are ornamented with cream-colored terra cotta banding featuring a light green-colored floral motif. The third floor is terminated with an original iron cornice. Above the roofline, the twin towers are flanked on either end by parapet walls covered with green-colored mission tiles. Originally, the twin towers were crowned with dark iron ribs and a trellised rooftop arcade stretched between them. These features were removed at an unknown date.

Despite alterations, Central Park Theater's front façade overwhelmingly retains its original appearance and materials, including red brick cladding, terra cotta banding, an iron cornice, and clay mission tiles. The first floor features its original three-bay configuration in which the central entrance bay and two flanking storefronts are easily discernible, despite the addition of new cladding materials and doors. Likewise, the upper two floors feature their original symmetrical fenestration design and parapet walls. The twin towers, though truncated, remain a distinctive visual landmark along Roosevelt Road in Lawndale.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 3

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

The theater's side and rear facades are clad in common brick. Side elevations feature a variety of single and double-door openings at all three levels, and the upper level doors lead to metal fire escapes. Some of the original wood doors on the first floor have been replaced with metal doors. The rear elevation features a single garage door opening.

Interior

The interior of the Central Park Theater has also retained the majority of its architectural integrity in terms of design and materials. The theater proper features three primary spaces: an entrance foyer, two-story lobby, and an auditorium, all of which feature original plaster walls and ceilings. The rectangular entrance foyer has a coved ceiling surrounded by a wide band of decorative plaster molding and six pairs of single-light doors with wood frames that access the lobby. The elegant two-story lobby features decorative plaster molding and an original double staircase of marble with decorative iron railings that leads to the mezzanine level, which is ornamented with large windows fitted with mirrored panes. Both the foyer and lobby feature original black-and-white ceramic tile flooring.

The foyer and lobby have experienced minor alterations through the years which do not detract from their original appearance. Changes include the removal of original lighting fixtures from both spaces, installation of carpeting over the marble double staircase, and the construction of two wood counters in the lobby adjacent to each stairway. Three of the foyer's plaster walls have been covered with plywood siding.

From the lobby, three pairs of original wood doors with curving, multiple panes open onto the auditorium's center and side aisles. Due to advancements in steel construction, Rapp and Rapp used the cantilever type of balcony and mezzanine seating at the Central Park, which eliminated all columns in the auditorium. This seating type consisted of a large upper balcony and a horseshoe of boxes at the mezzanine level below, which allowed a much larger seating capacity in close contact with the stage. The auditorium retains its original horseshoe of box seats at the mezzanine level, which feature curving fronts enhanced by plaster ornamentation of cherubs and flora. The seating on the auditorium's main floor slopes toward the stage, and paired metal vents for the theater's revolutionary air cooling system can still be seen beneath the seats at this level.

In 1971, the Central Park Theater was acquired by the House of Prayer, Church of God In Christ, and modifications were made to the auditorium to accommodate its new use as a sanctuary. All plaster walls on the main floor and behind the stage were covered with plywood siding, and an elevated wooden stage was built to accommodate church services. A suspended acoustical tile ceiling was installed above the mezzanine, thereby closing off the balcony level and truncating the main theater space, which soars over fifty feet in height. However, the theater's highly decorative stage and surrounding plaster wall---

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 4

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

enhanced by fluted Corinthian columns, pilasters and decorative grilles—still exist and can be seen at the balcony level, above the suspended ceiling.³

The balcony dramatically reveals not only the theater's elaborate stage area but its original plaster sidewalls and their decorative molding, which have remained uncovered at this level but exist in a deteriorated condition. When the balcony was closed off by the suspended acoustical tile ceiling in the 1970s, it was left unheated and susceptible to water infiltration. As a result, large areas of the plaster walls are disintegrating at this level and some of the plaster has fallen, revealing the masonry wall behind. However, the balcony level retains many original features, including the projection room, many of the original red velour seats, wood double-doors on the sidewalls that lead to fire escapes, and paired metal floor vents for the air cooling system. Two original wall sconces are also extant at the balcony level, as are several original chandeliers that hang precariously from the ceiling.

³ Originally, the theater's proscenium was comprised of a shallow center stage topped by a coved ceiling with painted murals depicting scenes of antiquity. A small, semicircular orchestra area was situated directly in front of the center stage, which was flanked by two smaller side stages. During the 1920s, the theater's center stage was enlarged and deepened, at which time the ceiling paintings above the original proscenium were removed and the flanking side stages removed. The orchestra area was removed at an unknown date, and the auditorium's original seats and wall sconces were eventually replaced. The enlarged central stage from the 1920s is the one that currently exists behind plywood siding.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 5

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

8. NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Central Park Theater, located at 3531-39 W. Roosevelt Road in Chicago, has local, state and national significance under Criterion A for entertainment/recreation and invention and under Criterion C for engineering. The 1917 Central Park Theater was the first movie palace of the Balaban and Katz Corporation, a highly influential theater chain that built dozens of luxury theaters throughout the Chicago region in the early 20th century. Balaban and Katz merged with Famous Players-Lasky in 1926, becoming the Paramount-Publix Corporation, which in its day was ranked as the largest theater operator in the world. As a result, the innovations pioneered at the Central Park—the design of lavish theater buildings in outlying commercial centers, live stage shows, outstanding service, and the novel use of air conditioning—were applied on a national scale to hundreds of theaters from coast to coast.

The Central Park Theater was the first of many increasingly opulent movie palaces designed by architects C.W. and George L. Rapp for their client, Balaban & Katz. Its success was so great that Rapp and Rapp became architects “in residence” for the Balaban & Katz, and later for the entire Paramount/Publix theater chain. Rapp and Rapp were among the nation’s most prolific theater architects in the early 20th century, creating magnificent and fantastical movie palaces throughout the United States and in major European cities.

Upon its opening in 1917, the Central Park was widely acknowledged as the first mechanically air cooled theater in the world, a development that revolutionized summer patronage. Starting with the Central Park, Balaban and Katz theaters were the first to open year-round, their air-cooled interiors doubling as enjoyable escapes from the brutal summer heat. Due to the advancement in steel construction, Rapp and Rapp also introduced the cantilever type of balcony and mezzanine seating at the Central Park, which eliminated all columns in the auditorium. This type consisted mainly of a large balcony with a horseshoe of boxes below, allowing a much larger seating capacity in close contact with the stage. The period of significance for the Central Park Theater is 1917-1955, the fifty-year cut-off for National Register designation.

The Central Park Theater constitutes a rare surviving example of an early 20th century movie palace in Chicago’s Lawndale neighborhood, and one of the few—if not the only—extant entertainment venues that once served both the community’s large Jewish population and later, its African American residents. The theater—featuring twin towers, red brick cladding and extensive terra cotta banding—remains a unique visual landmark in Lawndale and a reminder of Roosevelt Road’s past as the community’s primary commercial corridor.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 6

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

Balaban & Katz Corporation

The founders of Balaban and Katz—brothers Abraham J. (commonly known as A.J.) and Barney Balaban and their partner Samuel Katz—were all raised in Chicago's Maxwell Street neighborhood in Chicago's Near West Side ghetto, the sons of Jewish immigrants from Russia. Israel and Gussie Balaban, the parents of Barney (1887-1971) and A.J. (1889-1962), settled in Chicago in 1886 and eventually had eight children—seven sons and one daughter.⁴ The growing family lived frugally in the back three rooms of Israel's grocery store, in a two-story, wood cottage at 1137 S. Jefferson Street, near the Maxwell Street Market. Sam Katz (1892-1961), lived in the same neighborhood, where his father Morris worked in a barbershop at Roosevelt Road (formerly Twelfth Street) and Jefferson Street.

In the early 1900s, the Balaban family moved further west along Roosevelt Road to Chicago's Lawndale neighborhood,⁵ where their movie theater empire had its humble beginnings in a nickelodeon called the Kedzie. In 1907, eighteen-year-old A.J. Balaban took an evening job singing illustrated songs at the Kedzie, accompanied on the piano by his sister Ida (who later married Sam Katz). Located at the corner of Kedzie Avenue and Roosevelt Road, the neighborhood's commercial center at that time, the Kedzie was merely an old store converted into a theater by the use of a projection machine, a white sheet for a screen, and about 100 folding chairs. A.J. and his older brother Barney soon pooled their savings of \$175 to lease the Kedzie, and the entire family participated in the new business venture: A.J. booked the films, Barney and Max took turns at the box office and the door, and Ida played the piano for the pictures and the songs. A.J. soon found it necessary to devote his full attention to running the nickelodean.⁶

Within two years, the Kedzie's success allowed the Balabans to build a much larger theater nearby. In 1909 they borrowed enough money to purchase a site at 3241 West Roosevelt Road, just one block west of the Kedzie, and built the Circle Theater for \$25,000. When it opened, the Circle Theater was considered the finest motion picture house in Chicago. The Balabans installed a pipe organ, hired a four-piece orchestra, and added a balcony, creating a seating capacity of 1,000.⁷ Audiences were entertained between the short one-reel movies with vaudeville acts that A.J. booked downtown at the Western

⁴ Max, John, David, Elmer and Harry were the names of the other Balaban brothers.

⁵ The Balaban family first lived on Trumbull and Ogden Avenues and then moved to a three-flat building at 1234 Independence Boulevard. Their father Israel Balaban eventually became President of the Congregation Beth Hamedrosh Hagadol Synagogue on St. Louis Avenue and Douglas Boulevard, a member of the Board of the Hebrew Theological College, and was active in Jewish charities. Sources: Beatrice Shapiro, *Memories of Lawndale* (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, 1992) p. 54. "Israel Balaban Dead," *Chicago Tribune*, 3 May 1931.

⁶ Sime Silverman, "As to A.J. Balaban," *Variety: A.J. Balaban Variety Special*, 27 Feb. 1929: 3.

⁷ Ira Berkow, "The Nickelodeon that Grew," *Chicago Magazine*, Oct. 1977, p. 192.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 7

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

Vaudeville office. In 1914, Barney Balaban gave up his job as chief clerk of the Western Cold Storage Company to devote full time to the family business.⁸

The Balabans also moved into local film distribution, peddling cheaply made features and shorts to fellow theater owners. For a time the brothers even operated a restaurant, the Movie Inn, located downtown in the heart of film-sellers row. It was there that the Balaban brothers met their future partner Samuel Katz.⁹ Like A.J. Balaban, Sam Katz began his career in the movie industry by playing piano at neighborhood nickelodeons. In 1912, Katz acquired the Wallace Theatre next door to his father's barbershop. With the profits from this early venture, Katz financed his way through Northwestern University and took evening classes at John Marshall Law School.¹⁰ By 1915, Katz owned three theaters in conjunction with his father Morris and was in the movie business full time.¹¹

In 1916, rival theater owners were looking to locate in Lawndale, which was experiencing a real estate and population explosion at that time. The prospect of nearby competition prompted the Balabans to purchase a large site on Roosevelt Road just two blocks west of the Circle for the erection of a larger theater. The Balabans needed help with this ambitious undertaking, and formed a partnership with A.J.'s friend Sam Katz to build the Central Park Theater, the first of many increasingly opulent movie palaces designed by architects C.W. and George L. Rapp for their client, Balaban and Katz.

The immediate success of the Central Park spurred Balaban and Katz to build large luxury theaters in other areas of Chicago—all designed by Rapp and Rapp—which offered both movies and stage shows. It was immediately followed by the Rivera Theater at 4746 North Broadway in 1918. In 1921, Balaban and Katz completed the Tivoli at 63rd and Cottage Grove avenues on the South Side (demolished), and the Chicago Theater in the Loop.¹² Now Balaban and Katz could offer their brand of movie entertainment to residents of Chicago's West, North, and South Sides, and well as to crowds in the central city. All were immensely profitable from the start.

⁸ In 1919, the Balabans sold the Circle Theater property for \$85,000 to Louis Nath. Gussie Balaban, mother of A.J. and Barney Balaban, was listed as the owner. Source: "Real Estate Transfers." *Chicago Tribune*, 7 November 1919.

⁹ Douglas Gomery. *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) 41.

¹⁰ "Sam Katz, Film Executive, Dies; Leader in Exhibition, Production," *New York Times*, 13 Jan. 1961.

¹¹ Carrie Balaban. *Continuous Performance: The Story of A.J. Balaban*. (NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1942) 46.

¹² Balaban and Katz located their offices at the top of the Chicago Theater on North State Street following its completion.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 8

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

Initially, these four B&K theaters were separately incorporated.¹³ In 1923, with combined assets of more than \$10 million, they were merged into the single Balaban and Katz Corporation. At that time, 50,000 shares of common stock were made public on both the Chicago and New York stock exchanges, selling at \$50 per share. The proceeds of the stock sale were intended in part to pay off outstanding real estate mortgages of about \$2 million.¹⁴ By the mid-1920s, Balaban and Katz achieved domination of the Chicago cinema with the erection of numerous movie palaces, including the Uptown, Norshore, and Oriental, built with the excess monies produced by their four initial theaters. They also began to seek theaters in the surrounding states, acquiring the Midwest Theaters, a chain in Illinois and Wisconsin, in May 1924.¹⁵

Remarkably, the Balaban and Katz theater chain initially prospered despite having little access to Hollywood's top films. Instead, they differentiated their corporate product by focusing on several important factors: lavish theater buildings in outlying commercial centers, live stage shows, outstanding service, and air conditioning. These innovations—all of which were used together for the first time at the Central Park Theater—were quickly emulated by theater owners throughout the country.

Balaban and Katz demonstrated that to seek new, middle class audiences, one had to take the movie shows to their neighborhoods, rather than seeking an ideal location in the downtown. Notably, the company's first three theaters were strategically placed in the heart of Chicago's West, North, and South Side business and recreational centers, all of which had easy access to mass transit. Only then did it construct a theater, the Chicago, in the heart of downtown.

Once an outlying site for a theater was established, the company hired Rapp and Rapp to design functional yet dazzling movie palaces of unprecedented opulence that served as attractions unto themselves, as well as a temporary escape from day-to-day life. According to architect George L. Rapp, Balaban and Katz were the progenitors of a new period in the history of the motion picture theater, which began with different type of showman - "one who believed that people go to the theater to live an hour or two in a different world; that the atmosphere of a palace should prevail in a theater, and that this could be arrived at by gorgeous stage settings, luxurious drapes and enchanting music."¹⁶

Balaban and Katz's marketing strategy also emphasized superior service, with a stated policy of treating the movie patron as a king or queen. Theaters offered basement playgrounds and free child care, smoking

¹³ The Central Park Theater Corporation was officially established in April 1917 with capital of \$2,000. "New Incorporations." *Chicago Tribune*, 8 April 1917.

¹⁴ "Balaban & Katz To List Stock of Movie Theaters." *Chicago Tribune*, 6 July 1923.

¹⁵ Gomery, 43.

¹⁶ George L. Rapp. "History of Cinema Theater," In: *Living Architecture* (Chicago: A. Kroch, Publisher, 1930) 59.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 9

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

rooms, and organ music for those waiting in line. The centerpiece of the special Balaban and Katz service was the corps of ushers. Their movie palaces had 20 to 40 ushers and doorkeepers in attendance for all shows who were typically male college students working their way through school. Ushers were impeccably dressed in red uniforms with gold braid and white gloves, and coached continuously in their approach and service to the patrons. The Balaban and Katz "military type" usher control was quite a novelty. According to A.J. Balaban: "Patrons would stand to watch the maneuvers of the boys going off duty at 10:30 with almost as much interest as people in London watched the famous 'Changing of the Guard' at Buckingham Palace."¹⁷

Since Balaban and Katz was unable to initially offer its patrons the best films coming out of Hollywood, the company carefully developed a highly successful strategy that mixed movies with live stage shows, nurturing local talent into stars who would play Chicago exclusively. In time, Balaban and Katz theaters became more famous for their impressive stage attractions, orchestras, and organists than for the movies presented. Such shows were quite expensive to produce, costing between \$3,000 and \$5,000 to mount and run for a week. Consequently the shows played the entire Balaban and Katz theater circuit in Chicago, spreading the costs over four and later more theaters.¹⁸

Balaban and Katz theaters also featured air cooling systems, a novelty pioneered at the Central Park Theater that revolutionized summer patronage. It was Barney Balaban's experience at the Western Cold Storage Company in Chicago that led to the idea of cooling motion picture houses during the warm months. Balaban and Katz theaters were the first to open year-round, their air-cooled interiors doubling as enjoyable escapes from the brutal Chicago heat. Upon the opening of the Tivoli, the Chicago newspapers published a statement from Health Commissioner Herman Bundeson to the effect that the air in the theater was better than on Pike's Peak.¹⁹

As a testament to the Balaban and Katz Corporation's great success in the Chicago region, in 1926 it was purchased by Hollywood's largest movie company, Famous Players-Lasky, in a deal worth over \$100 million.²⁰ Sam Katz moved to New York to serve as Vice President of Theater Operations for the newly christened Paramount-Publix 500-theater chain, which grew to more than 1,000 theaters in the next few years, making it the largest chain in movie history up to that point. In his new position, Katz was able to transfer the innovations first used at the Central Park Theater to Paramount's theaters on a national scale.

¹⁷ Carrie Balaban, 71.

¹⁸ Gomery, 52.

¹⁹ Carrie Balaban, 69.

²⁰ "Balaban & Katz Taken Over by Famous Players," *Chicago Tribune*, 7 June 1926. The *Chicago Tribune* also reported that Barney Balaban and Sam Katz were each to receive an annual salary of \$250,000 from their newly arranged partnership, a princely sum at the time. Source: "Balaban and Katz to Draw \$250,000 Year Each in Film Merger." *Chicago Tribune*, 19 Nov. 1925.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 10

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

In 1929, A.J. Balaban moved to New York City to supervise stage production for the Paramount-Publix Theater Corporation.²¹ Within two years, however, A.J. left his executive positions at both Balaban and Katz and Paramount-Publix, worked briefly as a film producer at RKO studios in Hollywood during the mid-1930s, but soon went into semi-retirement, living half the year in Switzerland with his family. Paramount-Publix went into receivership during the Depression and in 1933 Katz was forced out. In the same year he was also replaced as President of Balaban and Katz Corporation by Barney Balaban who became President of Paramount in 1936.²² In 1947, the Balaban and Katz chain of theaters—which numbered over 100 in the Chicago region—was purchased by the American Broadcasting Company. The name Balaban and Katz finally disappeared in 1969, when it assumed the title of ABC Great States, Inc.

Central Park Theater History

In August 1916, the Balaban brothers (Barney and A.J.) and Sam Katz received a \$125,000 mortgage from the S.W. Strauss mortgage company to purchase a large site in Chicago's Lawndale neighborhood for the erection of a new theater, putting up their existing theaters as collateral.²³ The site—measuring 125-feet-wide by 167-feet-deep—was located at 3531-39 West Roosevelt Road (then Twelfth Street)—between Central Park and St. Louis Avenues.²⁴ On 1 February 1917, Balaban and Katz obtained a building permit to erect the three-story Central Park Theater building, which was to include offices and storefronts.²⁵

For the location of their first movie palace Balaban and Katz selected Lawndale, an important neighborhood commercial center with easy access to mass transit. Roosevelt Road was a natural site for the Central Park Theater—intended to attract patrons from throughout the West Side—as it featured a streetcar line and was close to the Douglas Park elevated line. This thoroughfare comprised the heart of Lawndale's bustling commercial district in the early 20th century, as described by one of its early residents:

In its heyday, Roosevelt Road was the heart and life of the neighborhood. A dense shopping area, the street was lined with every kind of store imaginable. You name it.

²¹ "1,500 Attend Banquet to A.J. Balaban," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 Aug. 1929.

²² "Barney Balaban Elected Head of Movie Chain," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 Jan. 1933. "Balaban Made New President of Paramount," *Chicago Tribune*, 3 July 1936.

²³ Gomery, 42.

²⁴ "West Twelfth Street Purchase Involves Building of \$275,000 Theatre," *Chicago Tribune*, 25 Aug. 1916. The site selected for the Central Park Theatre was originally occupied by a one-story building with three small storefronts. Rather than demolishing this structure, Balaban and Katz purchased a vacant lot across the street and had it moved. This building is extant, but altered beyond recognition.

²⁵ Building File Permits for 3531-39 W. Roosevelt Road. Permit no. 44659 dated 1 Feb. 1917.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 11

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

they had it. There were ice cream parlors and eateries, jewelry, furniture, and men's furnishings galore, and on and on.²⁶

The design of the Central Park Theater was entrusted to George and C.W. Rapp, noted theater architects who the Balaban brothers had admired for many years. A.J. Balaban later recalled that, "Our new partners [Sam Katz and his father Morris] knew nothing special about these architects until we took them to see the memorial theater they had built for the Ringling Brothers in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Then they became as enthusiastic about them as we were."²⁷

When it opened on 27 October 1917, the 2,800-seat Central Park Theater, with its distinctive twin towers studded with lights, created a dramatic visual landmark in Lawndale, and could be seen from a distance on Roosevelt Road. Central Park's impressive front façade was clad in red face brick and ornamented with terra cotta banding. The three-story building featured attractive wooden storefronts and centrally located doors to the theater that were sheltered by a delicate iron canopy. An open, trellised arcade was situated in between the two towers, which were flanked at each end by a parapet with ceramic tiles.

Architect George Rapp wrote in 1930 that, "The Central Park was furnished and decorated in a manner not previously attempted in a motion picture theater and the effect on theater-goers was very pronounced."²⁸ Early patrons marveled at the building's luxurious interior, which featured elegant tile flooring, decorative plasterwork, ornate chandeliers and wall sconces. Due to the advancement in steel construction, Rapp and Rapp introduced the cantilever type of balcony and mezzanine seating at the Central Park, which eliminated all columns in the Central Park's auditorium. This type consisted mainly of a large balcony with a horseshoe of boxes below, allowing a much larger seating capacity in close contact with the stage. Wrote George Rapp of the Central Park:

The clear direct view of the stage unobstructed by columns and the intimate contact that is always felt in this type of house made it an overnight success. Immediate plans began to be formulated for a much larger and more luxurious neighborhood motion picture theater to be worked up along its general lines.²⁹

The focal point of the theater was the proscenium, which featured a center stage topped by a coved ceiling with painted murals depicting scenes of antiquity. The shallow center stage was originally flanked by two smaller side stages where singers and a piano player could appear while the silent film was shown on the main stage. The modest, semicircular orchestra area was situated in front of the center stage. (In 1923,

²⁶ Beatrice Shapiro. *Memories of Lawndale*. (Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, 1992) 49.

²⁷ Carrie Balaban, 50.

²⁸ George L. Rapp, 60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 12

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

the proscenium was modified to create a single center stage necessary for a wider screen and bigger stage acts.) A.J. Balaban later noted that, "Our colored stage lighting [in the Central Park Theater] was extended to take in the whole house. The gently changing colors traveled from wall to ceiling melting from soft rose to blue, lavender and yellow as they touched the velour of seats, crystal of chandeliers, and the beautifully painted murals."³⁰

Upon its opening in 1917, the Central Park was widely acknowledged as the first mechanically air cooled theater in the world, a development that revolutionized summer patronage. A carbon dioxide system was developed for the Central Park that cooled the air by forcing it through vents in the floor, which can still be seen. The air then exhausted through ducts in the ceiling.³¹ Balaban and Katz's publicity during the summer months reminded Chicagoans of the rare treat inside their theaters. Icicles were hung from all newspaper advertisements, such as one placed on 23 June 1919 that read:

Balaban & Katz Announce the Only Air Refrigerating Systems in Theatrical use at the Riviera Theatre, Broadway and Lawrence, Central Park Theatre, W. 12th Street and Central Park...Refreshingly cool air, as invigorating as the balmy mountain breezes, undeniable beauty and exquisite entertainment are the valued possessions of these wonder theaters...Our Freezing Plant (Just Installed)³²

The Central Park Theater was built as the city's earliest example of a cinema "presentation house," which featured the use of an orchestra and stage acts to support the film being presented. S. Leopold Kohls was hired by Balaban and Katz to serve as conductor of the Central Park's orchestra. Kohls had grown up with "show business" in Vienna as a pit musician in theater orchestras, later spending a year or so on Broadway working in cafes and theaters before coming to Chicago. When the Central Park opened in 1917, Kohls was an instant hit. "His continental manners seemed to personalize our entertainment," A.J. Balaban later said, also noting that Kohls was "always profitable at the box office."³³

Balaban and Katz stage presentations had a flavor and an opulence all their own, as did their theaters. The guiding genius behind the shows that played first at the Central Park and later at all the Balaban and Katz deluxe movie houses was a young man from New York named Frank Cambria. Cambria initially came to Chicago in his role as General Manager of a company called New York Studios, which was retained by Balaban and Katz to provide side stages, drop curtain and stage scenery for the Central Park. Cambria had collaborated in many successful dramatic and musical productions in New York, and his freely given expertise became increasingly valuable to A.J. Balaban.

³⁰ Carrie Balaban, 52.

³¹ Gomery, 53.

³² This advertisement was found at the Theatre Historical Society, and did not include a source.

³³ Carrie Balaban, 54.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 13

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

Cambria's idea was basically a simple one: each stage show would follow a certain unity of theme, with all the settings, songs, music, and costumes elaborating on a single motif that usually had no relation to the picture on the program with it. According to theater historian Ben Hall: "Cambria's fine Italian hand had created a whole milieu of movie palace entertainment that had packed Chicagoans into Balaban and Katz theaters week after week for years. Cambria's Balaban and Katz presentations were different, lavish and above all, perfect in every detail."³⁴

The *Exhibitors Herald*, a trade publication for the movie industry, described a portion of a show called "Take It Easy," which played at the Central Park for the week ending 15 Jan. 1927:

The orchestra played, "Birth of the Blues," following a melodic lead composed of a section of "Rhapsody in Blue." This small orchestra did a good job of the piece, the choruses of which Kahn sang... Master Gilbert, juvenile song and dance man, was up next, singing "All I want is you," a new number that landed solidly, and doing a Russian dance bit without the aid of a Russian costume. The boy's a wow...³⁵

In her published essay titled, *Memories of North Lawndale*, former resident Beatrice Shapiro related her memories of the Central Park Theater during the thirties and forties:

The largest and most popular theatre on the street—with two balconies—was the Central Park. It featured movies from top-rate studios like Metro Goldwyn Mayer along with Flash Gordon serials and an occasional Dracula or Frankenstein thriller. The theatre drew large crowds on the weekends from within and without the neighborhood, and usually you had to wait in line if a top movie was playing. The price of admission was thirty-five cents for adults and fifteen cents for children.³⁶

Several competing theaters were once located in Lawndale, although none were of the same quality and scale as the Central Park. Other Lawndale theaters on Roosevelt Road during the forties were the Gold, near Homan Avenue; the Road (previously Gertlers, then the Independence), at Independence Boulevard; and the Lawndale Theater, at Pulaski (formerly Crawford) Avenue.³⁷

³⁴ Ben M. Hall. *The Best Remaining Seats: the story of the golden age of the movie palace*. (NY: Bramhall House, 1961) 207. Cambria returned to New York after Balaban and Katz's merger with the Famous Players-Lasky theaters created the Paramount-Publix chain in 1926.

³⁵ "Chicago Central Park: Week Ending January 15," *Exhibitors Herald*. 22 Jan. 1927.

³⁶ Shapiro, 54.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 14

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

Although the Central Park attracted patrons from all over the West Side, it mainly catered to Lawndale's large Jewish population. In January 1939, the *Chicago Tribune* reported on a three-day engagement at the Central Park by Moishe Oysher and Florence Weiss, singing stars of Yiddish films.³⁸ Various local businesses were housed in the building's storefronts and offices through the years. During the 1940s, Central Park's storefronts were occupied Harry Dicker's Barber Shop and an optical shop. Two physicians had offices on the second floor of the structure, while its entire third floor was leased to a catering business.³⁹

Melvin Dicker, whose father Harry owned the Central Park Barber Shop, worked as an usher after school at the Central Park Theater in the early forties when he was fifteen years old. He remembered that, "There were strict rules ushers had to follow: We had to carry a package of matches to light the customers' cigarettes when they smoked in the lobby; and we had to dress in blue and gray tuxedo-like uniforms and cummerbunds, wear white gloves and black shoes that shone, and carry a flashlight."⁴⁰

Starting in the 1950s, the Central Park Theater began to serve a changing clientele of African-American residents who had begun to replace Lawndale's mainly Jewish population. The theater remained in active use through the 1960s, although the character of Roosevelt Road dramatically changed in the aftermath of riots that followed the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. Large swaths of the Roosevelt Road shopping strip were destroyed by fire during the riots, which, combined with racial turnover in Lawndale between 1950 and 1970, purportedly resulted in the loss of 75 percent of its business establishments.⁴¹ Retail facilities burned out or closed on Roosevelt were never replaced, resulting in today's prevalence of vacant lots. In 1971, Central Park Theater was purchased by the House of Prayer, Church of God in Christ, under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Lincoln Scott. Since that time, the theater has served as a church sanctuary and a venue for special events, such as gospel concerts. Despite the adaptive reuse of the structure, it retains its original plan as well as the majority of its original materials and decorative elements.

Architects Rapp & Rapp and their Chicago Movie Palace Designs

Chicago's Central Park Theater was designed by Cornelius W. (commonly known as C.W.) and George L. Rapp, who were among the nation's most prolific theater architects in the early 20th century. The brothers were born in Carbondale, Illinois, the sons of an architect. George Rapp was educated at the University of Illinois and traveled extensively in Europe. When architect Edmund Krause was planning

³⁸ "Vaudeville," *Chicago Tribune*, 15 January 1939.

³⁹ Leases from Balaban and Katz to various tenants of the Central Park Theater's commercial and office spaces, dating to the 1940s.

⁴⁰ Shapiro, 55.

⁴¹ *Local Community Fact Book, 1990*: 107.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 15

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

the Majestic Theater in Chicago, George Rapp was his first assistant.⁴² In 1906, C.W. (died 1927) and George L. Rapp (1878-1941) established an architectural partnership that was based in Chicago.⁴³ Early theater commissions included the Majestic Theater (1910) in Dubuque, Iowa, and the Al Ringling Memorial Theater (1915) in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

The Central Park Theater was the first of many increasingly opulent movie palaces designed by Rapp and Rapp for their client, Balaban & Katz.⁴⁴ Its success was so great that Rapp and Rapp became architects "in residence" for the Balaban & Katz, and later for the entire Paramount/Publix theater chain. The Central Park was soon followed in Chicago by other legendary Balaban and Katz theaters, including the Riviera, Tivoli, Chicago, Uptown, Palace, and the Oriental, all designed by Rapp and Rapp. Although Rapp and Rapp went on to design theaters throughout the world, the greatest concentration of their work was in Chicago, due to their association with Balaban and Katz.

The Central Park Theater served as an important model for the ever-larger and increasingly ornate movie palaces designed by Rapp and Rapp. The Central Park's two-story lobby featured a double-staircase leading to the mezzanine level, which became a popular Rapp & Rapp treatment seen in different scales at the later Riviera and Uptown Theaters in Chicago. Its two-story height was a precursor to the five- and six-story lobbies of such theaters as the Tivoli and the Chicago. The cantilever type of balcony and mezzanine seating used by Rapp and Rapp at the Central Park Theater, with the mezzanine arranged in a horseshoe shape, became a common feature at Rapp and Rapp-designed theaters. The intimacy provided by this type of seating was intended to give the audience the feeling of being part of a stage set and proved to be ideal for large capacity theaters that culminated in the magnificent 4,500-seat Uptown Theater.

During the 1920s, the motion picture palace served as the country's major form of entertainment. Rapp and Rapp-designed theaters provided a brief escape to an exotic world that featured a variety of revival styles, including the French, Italian, and Spanish Baroque. Rapp and Rapp also designed a far eastern style movie theater in downtown Chicago, the Oriental, which featured an exotic interior filled with applied plasterwork elephants and chimeras. The hallmark of Rapp and Rapp deluxe movie palaces was opulence: interiors were luxuriously furnished and the walls of lobbies, foyers, and retiring rooms hung

⁴² Illinois Society of Architects Monthly Bulletin, August-Sept, 1941, p. 5. (obituary for George L. Rapp)

⁴³ Rapp and Rapp's early work included designs for a variety of buildings other than theaters, such as a six-story industrial building at Michigan Ave. and 25th Street (1909), and a ten-story luxury apartment building at South Shore Drive and 55th Street (1916). Sources: "Industrial Building Being Erected," *Chicago Tribune*, 31 Oct. 1909. "South Shore Beauty Spot," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 Oct. 1916.

⁴⁴ Showcasing the strength of their ties to Balaban and Katz, Rapp and Rapp designed the Balaban family mausoleum in Waldheim Cemetery, located in Forest Park, Illinois.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 16

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

with costly works of art, chandeliers, and beautiful drapes. Designer E.C.A. Bullock of Rapp and Rapp noted that the lobbies had to be spectacular to keep the patron's mind off the fact that he was waiting.⁴⁵

Rapp and Rapp's 4,000-seat Tivoli Theater at 63rd Street and Cottage Grove Avenue (1921; demolished) was a French Renaissance jewel, its grand lobby a reproduction of Royal Chapel at Versailles, designed by Mansard for Louis XIV. This breathtaking space ran the full width of the building and soared six stories in height, featuring a lofty colonnade and beautiful light fixtures. At the far end was a decorative stairway leading to the mezzanine and balcony. With several shows a day instead, easing the flow of patrons in and out of the theater became a prime consideration. The Tivoli's plan was so well conceived that the audience of the theater upon leaving did not come into contact with the hundreds of patrons waiting for the next show, exiting smoothly through separate stairways.

The 3,880-seat Chicago Theater, the downtown flagship of the Balaban and Katz theater chain, was also designed in the French Renaissance style and featured a stud-lighted Arc de Triomphe façade. Its towering five-story lobby, lined by a row of tall marble columns, rivaled the great hall of the Paris Opera for formal grandeur.

The mammoth Uptown Theater (1925) was the focus of the North Side's Uptown entertainment district during the 1920s. The 4,500-seat theater, built at a cost of \$3 million, featured a 60-foot-high gilded lobby, and its 46,000-square-foot main floor was unsurpassed in size until Radio City Music Hall was built seven years later in New York City. The Spanish Baroque Revival structure boasted an elaborate terra cotta façade and rose eight stories in height.

The Rapp's connection with Balaban and Katz ultimately took them beyond Chicago. Once Balaban and Katz merged with Famous-Players Lasky in 1926, the newly christened Paramount-Publix chain directed most of its commissions to the firm. In fact, Rapp and Rapp picture houses were sprinkled from Portland, Maine, to the Pacific Coast. Their works included the Paramount Theaters in New York City and Brooklyn, as well as theaters in Washington, St. Louis, Kansas City, Detroit, and Joliet, Illinois. In Europe, Rapp and Rapp exported their brand of movie palace design to Brussels, Paris, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Today, the motion picture palace has passed into history and most of Chicago's monuments to cinematic pleasure have succumbed to the wrecker's ball, vanquished by television, neighborhood change and other factors. Of the dozens of palatial Rapp and Rapp-designed movie palaces that once graced the Chicago region, only a few remain. In addition to the Central Park Theater, these include the Riviera at 4746

⁴⁵ David Naylor. *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy*. (NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1981) 36.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 17

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

North Broadway (1918); the Chicago Theater at 175 North State Street (1921); the Oriental Theater at 24 West Randolph (1925; now Ford Center for the Performing Arts); the Palace Theater at 151 West Randolph Street (1925; now Cadillac Palace Theater); and the Uptown Theater at 4814 North Broadway (1925).

Of these theaters, the Central Park enjoys great significance as the first movie palace designed for the influential Balaban and Katz entertainment empire by Rapp and Rapp. It constitutes a rare surviving example of an early 20th century movie palace in Chicago's Lawndale neighborhood, as well as the only extant entertainment venue that once served both the community's large Jewish population and, later, its African-American residents. The Central Park is also notable for its engineering innovations, which included an air cooling system that revolutionized summer movie patronage, as well as cantilevered balcony and mezzanine seating that eliminated all columns in the auditorium. This distinctive visual landmark, which retains much of its architectural integrity, remains an important and rare visual reminder of an era when the motion picture palace served as the country's major form of entertainment.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 18

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary and unpublished sources

Ancient Building File Permits for 3531-39 W. Roosevelt Road
Permit no. 44659 dated 1 Feb. 1917: "Owner: Balaban & Katz at 5 S. Wabash; Architect C.W.
and G.L. Rapp; 3 stories; theatre, stores, offices; net area: 100x167x55" (Roll no. 22, West
Division Book no. 10, p. 274)
Permit no. 8701D, dated 2 Feb 1924: "alterations to theater" (West Division Book no. 8, p. 336)
Permit no. 37685 dated 11 Feb. 1924: "sundry"
Permit no. 104919, dated 10 June 1937.

Leases from Balaban and Katz to various tenants of the Central Park Theater's commercial and office spaces dating to the 1940s.

Secondary and published sources

"A.J. Balaban, Movie Pioneer, Is Dead At 73," *Chicago Sun Times*, 3 Nov. 1962.
"A.J. Balaban Plans to Quit Present Movie Associations," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 April 1930.
"A.J. Balaban To Join RKO Studio As A Producer," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 Sept. 1934.
Balaban, Carrie. *Continuous Performance: The Story of A.J. Balaban*. NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1942.
"Balaban & Katz To List Stock of Movie Theaters," *Chicago Tribune*, 6 July 1923.
"Balaban and Katz to Draw \$250,000 Year Each in Film Merger," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 Nov. 1925.
Balaban & Katz Taken Over by Famous Players, *Chicago Tribune*, 7 June 1926.
Balaban & Katz advertisement for air conditioning at the Riviera and Central Park Theaters, dated 23 June 1919. (This was obtained from the Theater Historical Society's archive, and did not have a source.)
"Barney Balaban Dies at 83; Led Movie House Innovations." *Chicago Sun-Times*, 8 March 1971.
"Barney Balaban Elected Head of Movie Chain." *Chicago Tribune*, 24 Jan. 1933.
"Balaban Made New President of Paramount," *Chicago Tribune*, 3 July 1936.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 19

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

Berkow, Ira. "The Nickelodeon that Grew," *Chicago magazine*, Oct. 1977.

"Chicago Central Park," *Exhibitors Herald*, 22 Jan. 1927.

"Chicago Spends 50 Millions To See 1926 Shows," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 Dec. 1926.

Chicago Tribune, 10 Oct. 1916. (Notice regarding the upcoming construction of the Central Park.)

The Chicago Fact Book Consortium. *Local Community Fact Book, Chicago Metropolitan Area, 1990*. Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1995.

"Chicago Spends 50 Millions To See 1926 Shows," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 Dec. 1926.

"1,500 Attend Banquet to A.J. Balaban," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 Aug. 1929.

Gomery, Douglas. *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

Hall, Ben M. *The Best Remaining Seats: the story of the golden age of the movie palace*. NY: Bramhall House, 1961.

Illinois Society of Architects Monthly Bulletin, August-Sept, 1941, p. 5. (obituary for George L. Rapp)

"Industrial Building Being Erected," *Chicago Tribune*, 31 Oct. 1909.

Irving, Robert F., "Movie palaces of the '20s: Gone with the wind," *Inland Architect*, Feb. 1977, p. 16-21.

"Israel Balaban Dead; Father of Theater Owners," *Chicago Tribune*, 3 May 1931.

Levin, Steve (ed). "Central Park Theatre," *Marquee magazine*, Vol. 35, No. 1, First Quarter 2003.

Naylor, David. *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy*. NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1981.

"New Incorporations," *Chicago Tribune*, 8 April 1917.

Ramsaye, Terry. *A Million And One Nights*. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1926.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 20

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

Rapp, George L. "History of Cinema Theater," In: *Living Architecture* (Woltersdorf, Arthur, ed.). Chicago: A. Kroch, Publisher, 1930.

"Real Estate Transfers," *Chicago Tribune*, 7 November 1919.

"Sam Katz, Film Executive, Dies; Leader in Exhibition, Production," *New York Times*, 13 Jan. 1961.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Company. Map of Chicago, Cook Co., Illinois. Vol. 12. New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1923.

Silverman, Sime, "As to A.J. Balaban," *Variety*, 27 Feb. 1929.

"South Shore Beauty Spot," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 Oct. 1916.

Shapiro, Beatrice Michaels. *Memories of Lawndale*. Chicago: Chicago Jewish Historical Society, 1992.

"Vaudeville," *Chicago Tribune*, 15 January 1939.

"West Twelfth Street Purchase Involves Building of \$275,000 Theatre," *Chicago Tribune*, 25 Aug. 1916.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 10 Page 21

Central Park Theater, Cook County, Illinois

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The Central Park Theater is located at 3531-39 West Roosevelt Road, between Central Park and St. Louis avenues, in Chicago, Illinois. The building is situated in the middle of its block and faces north. Its large, rectangular footprint stretches between Roosevelt Road and the alley to the south. Legal Description: The Northwest quarter of the Northeast quarter of Block 2, Lots 1 to 4 of J R Severances Subdivision in Township 39 North, Range 13, East of the Third Principal Meridian, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries for the Central Park Theater in Chicago were chosen because they encompass the total area covered by the building.

Hollywood, 05000838,
LISTED, 8/11/05

ALABAMA, MARSHALL COUNTY,
Company E of the 167th Infantry of the Alabama National Guard Armory,
Rayburn Ave.,
Guntersville, 05000842,
LISTED, 8/12/05

ALABAMA, TALLAPOOSA COUNTY,
Avondale Historic District,
Bet. Rose Ave. and Scott St., Hillabee St. and 7th St.,
Alexander City, 05000837,
LISTED, 8/09/05

ALABAMA, TALLAPOOSA COUNTY,
North Central Historic District,
Bet. Hall and Summer, Warren and Hillabee, Warren and Ridgeway, MLK and
Hillabee,
Alexandria City, 05000833,
LISTED, 8/11/05

ALABAMA, TALLAPOOSA COUNTY,
South Central Historic District,
Bounded by Broad St., Tallpoosa St., Cherokee Rd., Bishop St., Franklin St.,
Willow St.,
Alexander City, 05000840,
LISTED, 8/09/05

ARKANSAS, CARROLL COUNTY,
Eureka Springs Historic District,
Most Eureka Springs and its environs,
Eureka Springs, 70000118,
ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION APPROVED, 8/09/05

COLORADO, LAS ANIMAS COUNTY,
First Methodist Episcopal Church,
216 Broom St.,
Trinidad, 05000783,
LISTED, 8/07/05

COLORADO, ROUTT COUNTY,
Crawford House,
1184 Crawford Ave.,
Steamboat Springs, 05000782,
LISTED, 8/07/05

FLORIDA, MANATEE COUNTY,
Jordan, Rufus P., House,
760 Broadway St.,
Longboat Key, 05000844,
LISTED, 8/12/05

ILLINOIS, BOONE COUNTY,
Lampert--Wildflower House,
410 E. Lincoln Ave.,
Belvidere, 05000870,
LISTED, 8/12/05

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,
Central Park Theater,

3531-39 W. Roosevelt Rd.,
Chicago, 05000873,
LISTED, 8/10/05

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,
Cornell Square,
1809 W 50th St.,
Chicago, 05000875,
LISTED, 8/11/05
(Chicago Park District MPS)

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,
Illinois Institute of Technology Academic Campus,
Roughly bounded by 31st St., State St., 325th St. and the Dan Ryan Expressway,
Chicago, 05000871,
LISTED, 8/12/05

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,
Purple, George E., House,
338 Sunset Ave.,
LaGrange, 05000845,
LISTED, 8/12/05

ILLINOIS, DU PAGE COUNTY,
Grand Theater,
123 N. Hale St.,
Wheaton, 05000872,
LISTED, 8/12/05

ILLINOIS, IROQUOIS COUNTY,
Prairie Dell Meetinghouse,
Jct. of 2550 East and 2150 North Rd.,
Iroquois vicinity, 05000846,
LISTED, 8/12/05

ILLINOIS, PIKE COUNTY,
New Philadelphia Town Site,
Address Restricted,
Barry vicinity, 05000869,
LISTED, 8/11/05

ILLINOIS, TAZEWELL COUNTY,
Denhart Bank Building,
101 Washington Sq.,
Washington, 05000874,
LISTED, 8/12/05

IOWA, SCOTT COUNTY,
Heinz, Bonaventura, House (first),
1128 W. 5th St.,
Davenport, 84001435,
REMOVED, 7/22/05
(Davenport MRA)

MARYLAND, MONTGOMERY COUNTY,
Moreland,
7810 Moorland Ln.,
Bethesda, 05000877,
LISTED, 8/11/05

MASSACHUSETTS, BERKSHIRE COUNTY,